THE COMMUNITY RADIO MOVEMENT IN INDIA: CHALLENGES

AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Media play a major role in the development of any nation as media informs, educate, persuade, motivate, aware and decide national agenda. Scholars like Daniel Lerner, Wilbur Schramm, Lucian Pye, Edward Shils and Ithiel de Sola Pool have done intensive work on the role of mass media in national development. Daniel Lerner found a high correlation among urbanization, literacy, media participation and political participation (Merrill, 1971). The positive role of development has been recognized in third world countries because information dissemination plays key role in bringing social change among the receivers. Media is working as a development tool in developing and under developed countries. The question arises which media is working as peoples media. Media can be divided into three sectors- public sector media, private sector media and community media. Public sector media is called mouth piece of government and remote control of private sector media is in the hands of big media conglomerates. As mainstream media is in the hands of a big media conglomerate which is a profit oriented industry and governed by market forces we cannot expect people's participation in mainstream media. We find less or no participation in mass media/mainstream media, whether they are governed by market forces or by government. The only media left for common people to raise their voice is community media/ alternative media. Alternate media could be seen as critical media which questions domination, expresses the standpoints of the oppressed and argues for the advancement of an active and participative society. As alternative media is both under-researched and an under-represented topic in media research, aim of this research paper is to identify potential and challenges of community radio as an effective alternative media in India. Community radio can play a major role in rural development of India as listening to the radio does not demand reading and writing ability and it is a portable media. The basic feature of community radio is that it has to be participatory. As said by the UNESCO, a community radio station is one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community. This study throws light on opportunities and challenges for community radio in India through the case study method of two community radios – Radio Bundelkhand of Orchha, and Radio Dhadkan of Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh.

KEYWORDS: Radio, Alternative Media, Community Radio, Radio Bundelkhand, Radio Dhadkan & Participatory Media

INTRODUCTION

Radio broadcasting in India can be divided into three categories- Public radio, Private radio and Community radio. Like other countries of the world radio broadcast started in India by amateur young enthusiasts who were inspired by Europe and United States of America. They formed two radio clubs in 1923- Radio Club of Bombay and Calcutta Radio Club. Indian Broadcasting Company (IBC) was formed by these young minds in 1927. Although this effort was not successful, but had alerted the colonial government, which was facing national movements at that time. With fear that radio broadcasting might be used in national movements by the freedom

fighters the government bought this company and renamed it as an Indian State Broadcasting Service (ISBS) in 1930 (Chatterji, 2015). Later it was renamed All India Radio (AIR) in June 1936, this name was suggested by the first controller of broadcasting Lionel Fielden. A new name Akashvani was given to AIR in 1957. The VividhBharati Service was launched in 1957 with popular film music as its main component. Akashvani has 420 radio stations at present. Area wise reach of AIR is 92% and population wise up to 99.19% in the country (AIR website). FM Radio was first introduced by All India Radio in 1977 at Madras and later in 1992 at Jalandhar. By the early 90s phone-in programmes in Delhi, Pune and other cities were experimented **(Kumar, 2010, p. 257).** Now the question arises if AIR has such a huge network which caters almost entire population, then what is the need of community radio in the country. Community radio is needed because community participation right from planning, programming, production of radio programmes to decision making is lacking on grassroots level in public media. Whereas public media is the mouthpiece of government and private media is in control of big conglomerates and market, new rays of hope as the voice of the people is alternate media based on community participation and community radio are one of them.

History of community radio in the world is as old as independent India. The year 1947 saw the appearance in Bolivia of Radio de los Mineros (Miners' Radio Station) and in Colombia of Radio Sutatenza. Where Miners radio raised the voice of the mining community their struggle and working condition, radio Sutatenza empowered the voice of peasants. Community radio campaign in India started soon after the supreme court of India ruled in its judgment in 1995 that airwaves are public property. Anna FM is the first community radio launched on February 2004 by Anna University. Earlier only institutions were allowed to operate community radio but later on due to the pressure of civil society's government notified a new community radio guidelines in 2006 which permit NGOs and other civil society organizations to own and operate a community radio station. According to Information and Broadcasting ministry Educational Institutions, Non-governmental organizations, KrishiVighyan Kendra and State Agriculture Universities are operating community radios in India and at present 217 community radio stations are functioning **(MIB report)**.
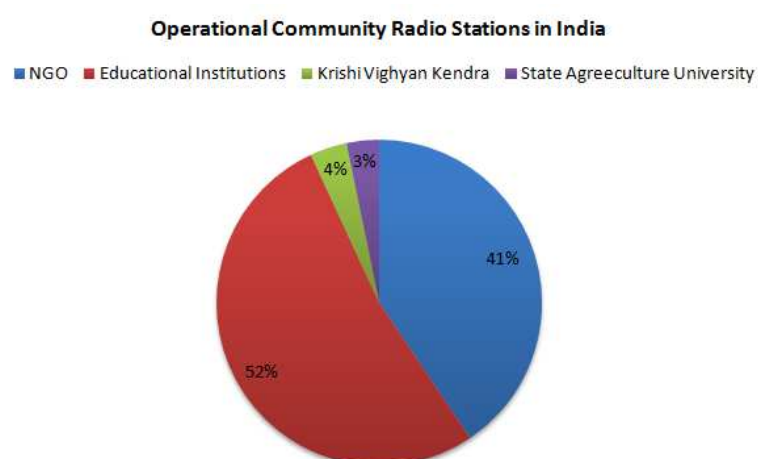

Operational Community Radio Stations in India

NGO ■ Educational Institutions ■ Krishi Vighyan Kendra ■ State Agreeculture University

Figure 1

(Data collected from Ministry of Information and Broadcasting website updated on 2018 May 21)

Characteristics of Community Radio Station

- It is one of the most low cost media.

- It is suitable to reach remote communities and marginalized group of people.

- It is a participatory media.

- It is a true representation of democracy, a community media by the people, of the people and for the people.

Eligibility to Apply for a Community Radio Station in India

As per the 2006 policy of the Government, an organization desirous of operating a Community Radio Station (CRS) must be able to satisfy and adhere to the following principles:

- It should be explicitly constituted as a 'non-profit' organization and should have a proven record of at least three years of service to the local community.

- The Community Radio Station should serve a specific well-defined local community.

- The ownership and management structure should be such that it reflects the community which it serves

- It should only broadcast programmes that cater to the educational, developmental, social and cultural needs of the community. (Entertainment is not banned explicitly. News Programmes are banned in Community Radio as well as FM Radio in India)

- The organization must be a Legal Entity i.e. it should be registered (under the registration of Societies Act or any other such act relevant to the purpose).

- Regarding the content, the two important provisions made are as follows:

- At least 50% of the content shall be generated with the participation of the local community, for which the station has been set up.

- Programmes should preferably be in the local language and dialect(s).

- The CRS license, thus given by the government entitled them to operate a 100-watt (Effective Radiated Power) radio station, with a coverage area of approximately a 12-km radius. A maximum antenna height of 30 meters is allowed **(IASPOINT, 2017).**

Objectives

- To identify opportunities and challenges in front of community radio in India.

- To analyse efficacy of community radio as an effective alternative media in India.

- To evaluate working patterns of Radio Dhadkan and Radio Bundelkhand.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a research paper on **A historic perspective of community radio in India (Saini, 2013)** stipulate thatCommunity Radio movement materialized in India with the establishment of the first community radio at Annamalai University. Though it is a well-established part of development communication strategy worldwide to voice the concerns of the marginalized, especially in underdeveloped and developing societies, it is quite recent in India that the agenda of community radio is being pursued vigorously especially after the supreme court landmark judgment about declaring the airwaves as public property.

According to the community radio handbook by UNESCO **(Fraser & Estrada, 2001)**, a community radio is characterized by its own and the community it is authorized to serve. It is owned and controlled by a nonprofit organization whose structure provides membership management, operation and programming primarily by members of the community at large. Community radio is media for people in a real sense as community radio is by the people, for the people and of the people. This way it is a true representation of community communication. UNESCO sees community radio as a medium that gives voice to the voiceless that serves as the mouthpiece of the marginalized and is at the heart of communication and democratic processes within societies. With community radio, citizens have the means to make their views known on decisions that concern them. In the age of multimedia and online communication, the potential of community radio to provide for effective outreach to discuss and create demand for the Internet has become even greater. The Kothmale Internet radio experiment in Sri Lanka has proven that radio stations can promote and use the Internet in rural communities.

(Basnet, 2011) Community broadcasting evolved through social movements as community-based organizations sought a way to express their own issues, concerns, cultures and languages. It sought to create an alternative to the state-owned public broadcaster and the private commercial media. Community radios as we see in the world today draw inspiration from the rich history of community broadcasting in Latin America that dates back to the Bolivian miner's radios of the late 1940s as well as from the early experiences of community broadcasting in North America, Europe and Australia. In the 1980s, community radios emerged in the Philippines and spread to several South East Asian countries and beyond. Countries like Nepal and Indonesia are considered places of rapid growth in community broadcasting. In Indonesia the airwaves opened up after the fall of the Suharto regime and today there are hundreds of small community radio stations across the Indonesian islands, serving peasants, fishing communities and the neighbourhoods of the urban poor. Wherever it has been established it has become clear that community broadcasting can play a specific and crucial role in encouraging public participation, facilitating community-level debate, providing access to information, strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity, and giving voice to poor and otherwise marginalized groups.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study followed a qualitative research approach involving the use of Case study method for in-depth study of two community radio stations- Radio Bundelkhand of Orchha and Radio Dhadkan of Shivpuri of Madhya Pradesh State of India.

Case Study of Radio Bundelkhand of Orchha, Madhya Pradesh

CommunityRadio Bundelkhand was launched on 23rd October 2008 with a tagline of "apna radio apnibaatein" by Development Alternatives NGO in Taragram of Orchha. It is the first NGO led community radio in Madhya Pradesh and second in India after Sangam Radio in Andhra Pradesh. The reach of this community radio station is up to twenty five villages. Broadcasting time is 10 a.m. to 12 and repeat broadcast at 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Following are the visions of Radio Bundelkhand-

- To promote Bundeli language, art and culture.

- Develop decision making ability among women, youngsters and deprived section of the society.

- To make people aware of local governance so that community people can participate actively.

- Experience sharing among the villagers about the clean drinking water, education, employment, agriculture, how to control diseases and shelter.

- To revive and enrich folk music, dance and other entertainment activities among the villagers of the area.

Radio Bundelkhand has also been experimental ground for Gram Vaani. Gram Vaani is started by some passionate young Delhi IITians in 2009 with an aim to build citizen-driven media platforms that give communities a voice of their own. It is a **social entrepreneurial organization** that **builds technological solutions for the development sector.** Some of their products include, GRINS (Gramin Radio Inter Networking System): Automation system for community radio stations; mNews: Grassroots mobile-based news; and vAct: Urban citizen engagement platform.

This community radio is facing tough competition from All India Radio and 92.7 Big FM in many aspects-resource, programme, reach and technology wise. Radio Programmes like Shubhkal on climate change adaptation and Meribundeli mere geet are very popular among listeners. Though there is water scarcity almost everywhere in this region but Azadpura village faces acute water scarcity and problem which women of this village faced was faulty well which required urgent repairing. The women aired this problem on Radio Bundelkhand and within four days the concerned authority replaced the missing wheel of the well. This is the power of community radio. Besides broadcasting radio programmes, radio reporters of Radio Bundelkhand also narrow cast these programmes in villages in listener groups and get direct feedback from them for further changes in programmes. Apart from broadcasting Radio Bundelkhand organizes awareness programmes with other groups in the area.

Case Study of Radio Dhadkan of Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh

Community Radio Dhadkan was launched on October 2010 by NGO Sambhav with technical and financial support of UNICEF. It broadcastsprogrammes three times a day- 7 to 8 am, 1 to 2 pm and 7 to 8 pm. Its reach is up to fifty one village. Visions of Radio Dhadkan- empowering village community, to make the community aware about government's development schemes, to promote folk music, art and culture in the area, to promote girl child education and stop female feticide, to encourage mother and child welfare, to stop child marriage and dowry, to provide information through programmes for all round development of youths, to make panchayati raj institution transparent, active and responsive, to work for social justice, to provide platform for local artists. One of Radio Dhadkan's major strategic goals has been to include the maximum number of people, especially Sahariya from the community in the management committee, radio station staff.

The USP of Radio Dhadkan is its operational part. This community radio is operated by non radio professionals and run by community people. Activists of NGO Sambhav helped community people to face the challenges of running community radio. Radio reporters RamshriChandel, Champaadivasi and Sarnamsaid, recalling their earlier days that- it was very fearful even to touch the machines because they have never seen such broadcasting set up earlier in their life. Station manager of Radio Dhadkan Ms. Vandana told in starting we feared even to touch the computers, but now we are so used to these machines that we play with them. Now right from recording of radio programmes to scripting, editing and broadcasting them has become easier. Earlier it was very difficult to manage the field recording and studio work simultaneously. Sometimes all the staff was on field and sometimes all there in the studio at a time. It was difficult to manage them. Slowly learning by doing helped us. Now we follow our schedule properly. Each radio reporter is responsible for ten villages. They record new programmes from these villages and narrowcast broadcasted programmes in

listener groups. Each village has at least two listener groups. These radio reporters cover local cultural events, festivals and mela. They also go to schools for recording children's programmes. Radio reporter Champaadivasi and RamshreeChandel told that village women were always eager to get record their songs such as- bannee-banna, daddar, tappa, sawan, languriya, holi songs etc. Local artists often visit the studio to record their songs. It is worth mentioning that Radio Dhadkan has recorded more than thousand songs of local singers. These local artists apart from traditional songs compose public awareness songs on local issues such as-

- *"Padhayinahibitiyaammamori*

  Chotibitiyakobyaahrachaydau

  Andhekueinmeinkaisegiraayedau

  Ab to kholoankhiyaanammamori...

- *Sabsebajjarhaichhatikisaankee*

  Khabarnahirahatjaankee...

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During these case studies researcher has observed that financial and technical support is the major challenges for community radios to survive. The licensing process is also time taking and not transparent. Earlier one has to get clearance from five ministries to get the license. Although Community radio facilitation center (CRFC) is formed by broadcasting ministry to bring the licensing process single window clearance but all is not well. On ground challenges are still persisting like weak signals of radio due to poor quality of transmitters, maintenance of broadcasting set up, financial challenges, lack of training and exposure for community radio staff, upgraded radio software, marketing team for an approaching market for getting advertisements, less air time and commercial rates for advertisements in comparison with private FM and AIR, step motherly treatment with community radios in comparison to private FMs. UNICEF supports community radios for a limited time with the impractical hope that meanwhile it would be financially self dependent. The FM transmitter equipment for the community radio station can be sold by only three authorized vendors. The third vendor, Nomad, designs and manufactures indigenous transmitters, and got approval recently after a long struggle with the bureaucratic red tape. Prior to Nomad, the transmitter equipment was available at a prohibitively enormous cost from the other vendors. Most of the community people are not aware of such radio stations because of the less popularization of community radio. Community radio derives its strength and popularity from community participation. In practice participation is harder because lack of trained radio staff having journalistic approach and technical training, right from planning to record, scripting, editing and compiling, making radio programmes consume a lot of time and to dedicate such a long time voluntarily is not possible for people associated with community radios so they demand for some monetary help. Some radio professionals are needed to run the broadcasting smoothly, but because of lack of funds community radios cannot afford to hire radio professionals and technical experts. In interior areas discontinuity of electricity creates lots of problems and community radio requires backup and generator which is costly.

CONCLUSIONS

Community radio is a development communication tool addressing issues of local community.It has great potential to serve as a development tool in rural India in terms of creating awareness, spreading information and facilitating

communication. Unfortunately Community radio in India is still at a nascent stage. Because of a long campaign and advocacy by civil society government targeted for 4000 community radios in 2008 but even after ten years only 217 community radios are operational and most of these are campus radios run by various institutions not by communities. According to UNESCO community radio is truly a medium for grassroots communication which enables the most vulnerable to participate in decisions for positive change in their lives, but due to many hurdles said above this goal is still far away. Even United Nation supports right to free expression and community media. In Ninth United Nations round table on Communication for Development it was underlined that the governments should implement a legal and supportive framework favouring the right to free expression and the emergence of free and pluralistic information system, including the recognition of the specific and crucial role of community media in providing access to communication for isolated and marginalized groups.

RECOMMENDATION

Community radio campaign is needed to launch as movement and here panchayati raj institutions can play a major role to support and strengthen the community radio movement. Though Community radio stations can manage their production and management provided they need guidance and support in content creation, programme production and delivery of these programmes for this radio professionals of private FMs and AIR should be included in advisory committees of community radio to enrich the programming part and to share their experience with them. The licensing process for NGO run community radio should be at par with campus community radio. Monopoly in transmitter supplying for community radio should be stopped. It is often observed that community radios are suffering from lack of staff and this affects the quality of broadcasting to tackle this problem youth of these rural areas should be trained as part time radio volunteers. There should be formal reservation for spectrum allocation for the community radio in FM band as is the case with the private FM. More and more awareness workshops for community radio should be organized by the government and Community Radio Forum so that the community may aware of the importance of free expression and community media. To strengthen democracy and decentralization of power community radio can play a major role. Community radio can function as watch dogs to eradicate corruption also and then only they may be the voice of the voiceless. Organizations like Community Radio Forum (CRF), Common Wealth Educational Media Center for Asia (CEMCA), Gramvaani should join hands together to strengthen the community radio movement in India.

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